

WANTED



Michael Zagari's

LOU REED **DEAD OR ALIVE**

(What's the difference)
for transforming a whole generation
of young Americans into faggot junkies.

LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS DEATH DWARVES



Michael Zagari/s

Or,

How I Slugged It Out With Lou Reed & Stayed Awake

Ego? It may not be the greatest word of the 20th century, but it's sure the driving poison in the vitals of every popstar.

Who else but Lou Reed would get himself fat as a pig, then hire the most cretinous band of teenage cortical cavities he could find to tote around the country on an all-time death drag tour?

Who else would doze his way back over the pond in a giant secobarbital capsule and labor for months with people like Bob Ezrin, Steve Winwood and Jack Bruce to puke up *Berlin*, a gargantuan slab of maggotty rancor that may well be the most depressed album ever made?

Who else would then poke his arm so full of vigorating vitamins that he lost all that fat almost literally overnight, practically cartwheeling onstage in spastic epic(ene) colitic fits when everybody expected him to bloat up and die? Who else would make this gig looking like

By Lester Bangs

some bizarre crossbreed of Jerry Lewis of idiot movies fame and a monkey on cantharides? Who else but Lou Reed could have survived making a public embarrassment of himself for so long that he actually managed to lasso a great rock 'n' roll band to back up his monkeyshines?



Speed kills.

I'm not a speed freak.



Name me somebody who would come back from the quagmire that was *Berlin* to make *Sally Can't Dance*, an album that broke its own ankles going out of every seasoned Reed fan's way to make all possible concessions to commercialism on the lowest level of palatable pap, and get that crappy platter in the Top Ten?

Who else would write whole new volumes in tonsorial culture: shaving his traditionally kinky locks to the literal skull for that simian charm; then topping even his own act by carving iron crosses in that mangy patch of stubble (a whim which put him in Rona Barrett's column: "Well, they said it couldn't be done, but somebody's finally managed to invent a totally new hairstyle..."); who else would then redo his dome Hitler Youth blonde so he resembled a bubblegum Kenneth Anger, which is obviously one damn cool way for a popstar to look, especially if he's been looking like sulking shit for as long as Lou had?

Who but Lou Reed could add a whole new entry to the annals of onstage tastelessness by tying off during the middle of "Heroin" and pretending to shoot up with an actual syringe which, on at least one gig, he then handed to a member of the audience as



Goodnight Ladies: Lou cronies it up with Alice and old Reed confrere Ernie Thormahlen, who modeled on the back of *Transformer*, designed the cover art for *Velvet Underground Live 1969*, and used to carry Lou across roads in England.

a souvenir?

What other rock artist would put up with an interview by the author of this article, read the resultant vicious vitriol-spew with approval, and then invite me back for a second round because of course he's such a masochist he loved the hatchet in his back?

Not a living soul, that's who.

* * *

Why is this guy surviving, who has made a career out of terminal twitches ever since the Velvet Underground surfaced dead on arrival in 1966? Well, for one thing, the Velvets emerged from under one of the many entrepreneurial wings of Andy Warhol, who has managed to accomplish more in this culture while acting (in public at least) like a total autistic null-node than almost any other figure of the 60s. Lou learned a lot from Andy, mainly about becoming a successful public personality by selling your own private quirks to an audience greedy for more and more geeks. The prime lesson he learned was that to succeed as this kind of mass-consumed nonentity you must expertly erect walls upon walls to reinforce the walls that your own quirky vulnerability has already put there.

In other words, Lou Reed is a completely depraved pervert and pathetic death dwarf and everything else you want to think he is. On top of that he's a liar, a wasted talent, an artist continually in flux, and a huckster selling pounds of his own flesh. A panderer living off the dumbbell nihilism of a 70s

generation that doesn't have the energy to commit suicide. Lou Reed is the guy that gave dignity and poetry and rock 'n' roll to smack, speed, homosexuality, sadomasochism, murder, misogyny, stumblebum passivity, and suicide; and then proceeded to belie all his achievements and return to the mire by turning the whole thing into a monumental bad joke with himself as the woozily insistent Henny Youngman in the center ring,

“Hendrix was one of the great guitar players, but I was better.”

mumbling punch lines that kept losing their punch. Lou Reed is a coward and a sissy by any standard of his forebears such as Tennessee Williams and William Burroughs.

Lou Reed's enjoyed a solo career renaissance primarily by passing himself off as the most burnt-out reprobate around, and it wasn't all show by a long shot. People kept expecting him to die, so perversely he came back not to haunt them, as he perhaps would like to think (although I think he'd rather have another hit record if he had to sing about it never raining in California to get it), but to clean up. In the sense of the marketplace. A friend of mine who works in a record store in Cambridge Mass told me about the people who buy Lou Reed records: "You get like these 28 year old straight divorcee types, asking for *Transformer* and the Velvet

Underground... but the amazing thing is that suddenly there's all these 14 year olds, coming in all wide-eyed: 'Hey, uh... do you have any Lou Reed records?'"

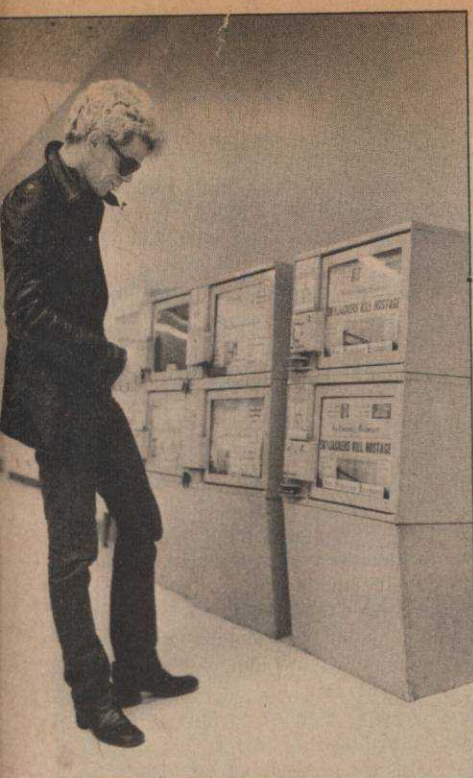
Right. That spooky man, booga booga. Meanwhile, his chronic multiple abuses of the mind and body rise and fall according to the weather. He had the shakes all the way through his fat-man tour in spite of massive valium ingestion. Blue Weaver on the recording of *Berlin*: "We went in and laid down all the instrumental tracks, the whole thing was done and sounded great. Then they brought Lou in. He can't do it straight, he's got to go down to the bar and then have a snort of this and that, and then they'd prop him up in a chair and let him start singing. It was supposed to be great, but something went wrong somewhere."

I had a friend working as a busboy in Max's Kansas City when Lou was in transit from blubber to his present emaciation, and the guy called me up one day: "Your boy [that's what he calls him] was in again last night... Jesus... he looks like an insect... or like something that belongs in an intensive care ward... almost no flesh on the bones, all the flesh that's there sort of dead and fallow and hanging, his eyes are always darting all over the place, his skull is shaved and you can see the pallor under the bristles, it looks like he's got iron plates implanted in his head... everybody agreed that they'd never seen anything as bad as this. Plus which all the waitresses hate him because he never tips."

Lou Reed is my hero principally because he stands for all the most fucked up things that I could ever possibly conceive of. Which probably only shows the limits of my imagination.

The central heroic myth of the Sixties was the burnout. Live fast, be bad, get messy, die young. More than just "hope I die before I get old," it was a whole cool stalk we had down or tried to get. Partially it has to do with the absolute nonexistence of real, objective, straight-arrow, head-held-high, noble, achieving heroes. Myself, I always wanted to emulate the most fucked up bastard I could see, at least vicariously. As long as he did it with some sense of style. Thus Lou Reed. Getting off vicariously on various forms of deviant experience compensated somehow for the emptiness of our own drearily "normal" lives. It's like you never want to see the reality; it's too clammy watching someone shoot up junk and turn blue. It ain't like listening to the records.

That's why Lou Reed was necessary. And what may be even more important is that he had the good sense (or maybe just brain-rot, hard to tell) to realize



Like Jim Morrison, Lou has realized the implicit absurdity of the rock 'n' roll tough guy pose and parodied it, while remaining secretly more than proud to be known as Mr. Bad Vibes.

that the whole concept of sleaze, "decadence," degeneracy was a joke, and turned himself into a clown, the Pit into a puddle. Any numbskull can be a degenerate, but not everybody realizes that even now; like Jim Morrison, Lou realized the implicit absurdity of the rock 'n' roll *bette noir* badass pose, and parodied, deglamorized it. Though that may be giving him too much credit. Most probably he had no idea what he was doing, which was half the mystique. Anyway, he made a great bozo, a sort of Eric Burdon of sleaze. The persistent conceit of Lou's recent press releases — that he's the "street poet of rock 'n' roll" — just may be true in an unintended way. The street, after all, is not the most intellectual place in the world. In fact, it's littered with dopey jerkoffs and putzes of every stripe. Duncerville. Rubbery befuddlement. And Lou is the king of 'em all, y'all.

Yep, the Champ was coming to town, and I was ready for battle. I guzzled Scotch by the case and chewed valiums like Jujubes. Tried to shoot speed but the quack doctor, who services every other freako and housewife on Woodward Ave., threw me out of his offices. Mostly I just listened to my Velvets records and what I could stand of *Sally Can't Dance*, and boned up on my insults. Word had filtered back to me that the Original Miscreant had gotten a good hoot out of the last slash job I did on him. People were speaking in hushed tones of "a love-hate relationship... it's incredible," stammered

Dennis Katz, Lou's manager, whose brother Steve graduated from Blood, Sweat & Tears to producing Lou Reed albums, which should give you some indication of what happened to a functioning Underground Movement in America.

Now, I'll admit that I'm flattered by the fact that one of my heroes has become one of my fans (several of them have, in fact; in fact, this usually coin-

“All the waitresses hate him because he never tips.”

cides with my conclusion that said hero is dogshit) (and please don't infer hubris from this; I'm amazed that I can get away with this shit), but I must flatly dismiss all this "love-hate" folderol as pure hype. The promoters rigged it up. The fact is that Lou, like all heroes, is there for the beating up. They wouldn't be heroes if they were infallible, in fact they wouldn't be heroes if they weren't miserable wretched dogs, the pariahs of the earth, besides which the only reason to build up an idol is to tear it down again, just like anything else. A hero is a goddam stupid thing to have in the first place and a general block to anything you might wanta accomplish on your own. Plus part of the whole exhilaration of admiring somebody for their artistic accomplishments is *resenting* 'em 'cause they never live up to your expectations. Plus which they all love

the abuse, they're worse than academics, so the only thing left to do is go whole hog nihilistic and tear everybody you ever respected to shreds. Fuck 'em!

So I was gnashing ready to pound Lou to a sniveling pulp the minute he hit town. THIS WAS IT! THE BIG DAY! THE ONLY OLD HERO, MUCH LESS ROCK MUSICIAN, LEFT WORTH DOING BATTLE WITH! William Burroughs is too old, and all Mailer wants to do is cracker barrel philosophize. Face it, pugs, Lou Reed is the only culture hero left with any balls at all, the only real Man in the American Ring! All the rest of 'em are (just ask any woman) faggots and sissies. With the possible exception of Dotson Rader.

I went into the Hilton and found Lou's party in the restaurant and sat down at a table adjacent. Then I got up and walked over. He's sitting there vibing away in his black T-shirt and shades, scowling like a house whose fire has just been put out, muttering to himself as he picked desultorily at indistinct clots of food on his plate: "Goddam fucking place... what a shit-hole... dump... fucking nerve... assholes..." Turned out he'd been refused entrance to Trader Vic's because of the way he was dressed, and he was fuming about it. I walk up, shake hands: "Hi Lou... I believe you remember me."

Dead cold fish handshake. "Unfortunately." Just sat there. Didn't move. Didn't smile. Didn't even sneer. Concrete scowl. Solid veneer, with cement behind that. My party had just finished

sitting down and ordering when suddenly Lou bolted up from his table and stalked out of the room, muttering something about going to get a newspaper. By the time we finished eating and had another drink he still hadn't returned. It was getting perilously close to, uh, showtime, and his road manager Barbara Fulk was getting nervous: "Where in god's name could he have gone?" Turned out later he'd gone for a walk around the block and gotten lost. An old song was ricocheting through my head, some faint memory of a time in 1968 when I told my nephew about this kid who was embarrassing me by hero worshipping me because I'd turned him on to Velvet Underground albums, speed, etc. "I don't wanna be anybody's fuckin' hero," I snarled at the time.

My nephew made up a two-line song on the spot:

"Don't wanna be a hero
Just wanna be a zero."

* * *

The show was great. To hell with it. Later we're back at the hotel and Barbara is telling me that Lou is finally ready, so we walk down the hall to the Great Man's (at least temporal) sanctum sanctorum.

There he was, sprawled out on his bed, surrounded by his cohorts, roadies and sycophants, as well as a strange somewhat female thing which had been at the table with him at dinner, which I had in fact at first mistaken for Barbara, and which I now got a closer look at.

You simultaneously wanted to look away and sort of surreptitiously gawk. At first glance I'd thought it was some big dark swarthy European woman, with long rank thick hair falling about her shoulders. Then I noticed that it had a beard, and I figured, well, cool, the bearded lady, with Lou Reed, that fits. But now I was up closer and it was almost unmistakably a guy. Except that behind its see-thru blouse, it seemed to have tits. Or something. It was beyond the bizarre, between light and shade. It was grotesque. Not only grotesque, it was abject, like something that might have grovelingly scampered in when Lou opened the door to get the milk and papers in the morning, and just stayed around. Like a dog that you could beat or pat on the head, either way didn't matter because any kind of attention was recognition of its very existence. Purely strange, a mother lode of unholy awe. If the album *Berlin* was melted down in a vat and reshaped into human form, it would be this creature. It was like the physical externalization of all that fat and mung Lou must have lost when he shot all those vitamins last winter. Strange as a yeti from the cozy brown snow of the east. Later I noticed it, midway in the interview, turning the



Michael Zagaris

“It has to do with electricity
and the cell structure.”

pages of a book. But from the way it did it, it was obvious that it was not reading, it was merely turning pages, quivering uncertainty frozen incarnate. At one point I yelled at Lou, "Fuck you, I ain't gonna talk to you, I'm gonna interview her!"

"She's a he. And you ain't int'r'wing 'm, man." Lou seemed somewhat offended, though his tone was the same even, sullen, occasionally venally darting mutter he maintained all night.

Later I was told that this creature, whose name was Rachel but whom the people in my party referred to next day as Thing, was introduced to the concert hall people as "Lou's babysitter." Hmmm, seemingly a long way down from Betty, the blonde wife he brought on the last tour, who was rather wholesome looking as she gulped coffee and kept track of things Lou lost. Still, you never know. What's really interesting is that here's Lou Reed, the cat's gay, he's a celeb, he's traveling, he's got lots of money, it stands to reason he could have beautiful boys or whatever he wanted around him. So you gotta conclude he wanted this strange, large, frightened being that never talked and barely ever lifted its head. There was a sense of permanency, even protectiveness, about the relationship.

Me, I was drunk. I glugged about a

half quart of Johnny Walker Black while waiting for Lou to get ready to argue, and what the hell, last time Lou was in town he was drinking double Johnny Walkers while I sat there nursing my Bloody Mary, trying to think of questions while he rambled on woozily saying things like "Will Yoko leave Paul?" and "I admire Burt Reynolds a lot."

Now we were back in the fray, and he just sat there, too goddam cool even though I was almost positive he was speeding or coking his brainpan shiny. He obviously considered me a total bumpkin and I played it to the hilt, demanding more Scotch (which he refused to give me: "Enough of your drinking. Stop. You can't handle it. I don't want you to get wasted."), doing jive spade routines and hollering (to me hilariously funny) things like "Oh pardon me *suh*, it's furthest from my mind, I'm just lookin' for HAW HAW HAW!"

Lou started off with a backhanded compliment that turned into a kudoforous insult midway. "You know that I basically like you in spite of myself. Common sense leads me to believe that you're an idiot, but somehow the epistemological things that you come out with sometimes betrays the fact that you're kind of onomatopoeitic in a subterranean reptilian way."

"Goddam, Lou," I enthused, "you sound just like Allen Ginsberg!"

"You sound like his father. You should do like Peter Orlovsky and go have shock. You don't know any more than when you started. You just kind of chase your tail."

Damn, beat me to the first good left hook. "That's what I was gonna say to you! Do you ever feel like a self-parody?"

"No. If I listened to you assholes I would. You're comic strips."

"That's okay," I hoohawed, losing ground steadily, "I don't mind being a comic strip. *Transformer* was a comic strip that transcended itself."

He told me to shut up, and we sat there and stared at each other like two old geezers by a spittoon.

"Okay," I summoned my bluster, "now let's decide whether we're gonna talk about me or you."

"You."

"All right. You start."

"Okay... ummm... who's gonna win the pennant?"

I don't know shit about sports, can't tell the Houston Persons from the Denver Dolophines, but if there's one subject I'm up on it's glitter. I figured this old deviance buff would take the bait. "I saw Bowie the other night."

"Lucky you. I think it's very sad."

"He ripped off all your riffs, obviously." I intended this as a big contention,

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ALIASES OF THE ANIMAL



Velvet Underground, 1969: sweater cool.



Raeanne Rubenstein

Solo bow, early 72: the coy juicer.



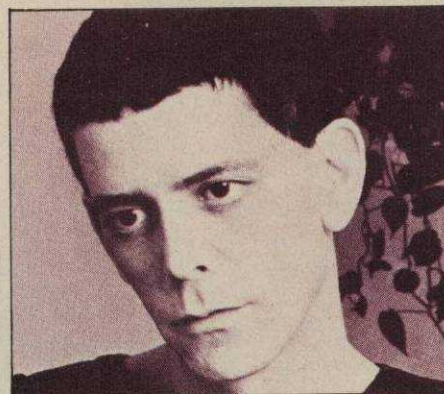
Mick Gold

Live, late 72: the dozing fat boy.



Joseph Stevens

Live, early 73: zombie shuffle.

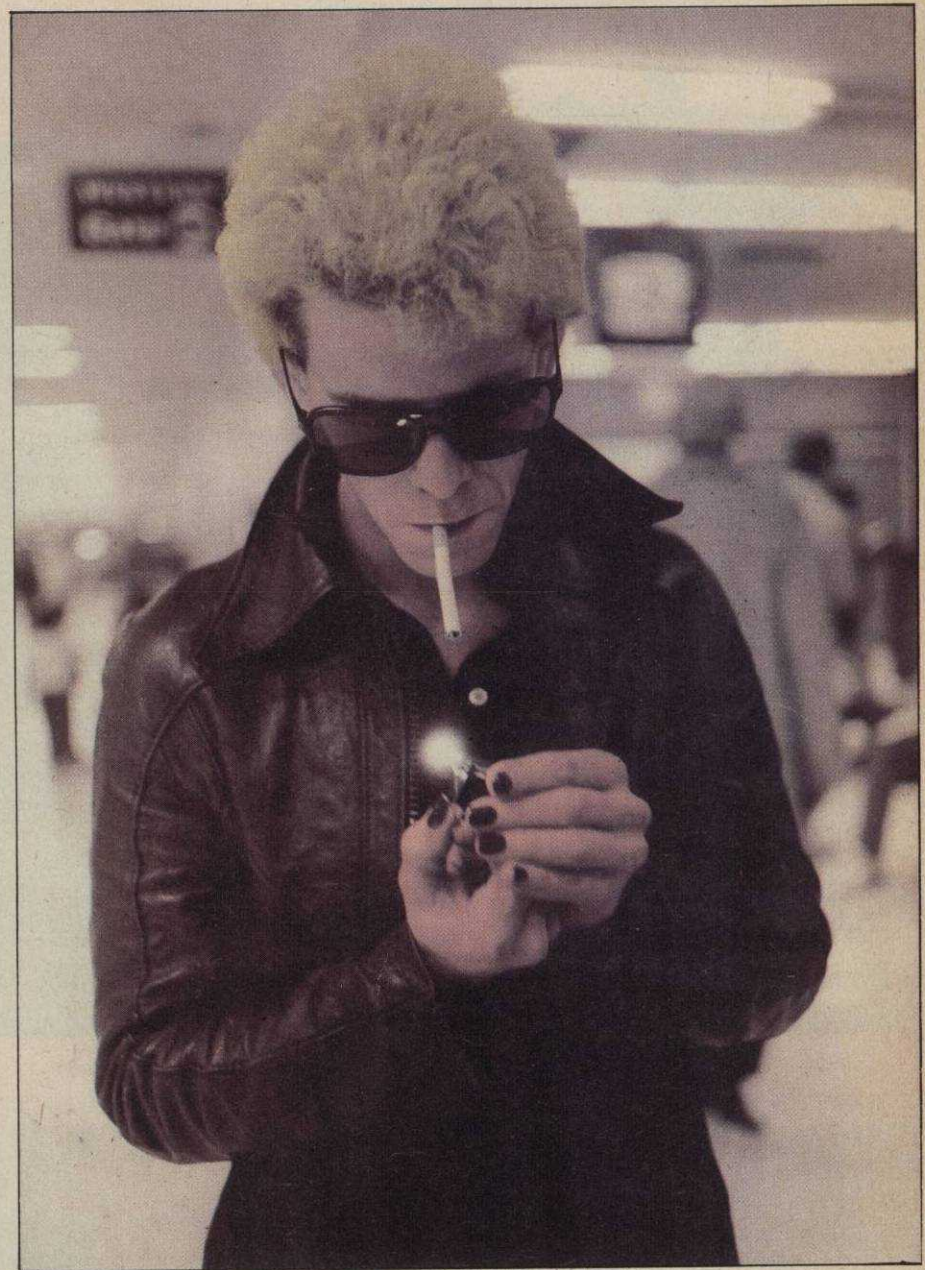


Late 73: slim and grim.



Bob Gruen

Early 74: iron crosses, insect paranoia.



Michael Zagaris — Coloring by Kristin Sundboom

Late 74: blonde bad boy, cool again at last. Your roots are showing.

Lou Reed

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 40.

although I really meant more than what I said. Just look in your copy of *Rock Dreams* and you'll see it right there, the Myth: Lou Reed looking younger, innocent, fingering his lip wide-eyed in a Quaalude haze, as Bowie lurks behind him, pure Lugosi, eyes glittering, ready to strike.

Lou wouldn't go for it. "Everybody steals riffs. You steal yours. David wrote some really great songs."

"Aw c'mon," I shouted at the top of my lungs, "anybody can write great songs! Sam the Sham wrote great songs! Did David ever write anything better than 'Wooly Bully'?"

"You ever listen to 'The Bewlay Brothers,' shithead?"

"Yeah, *fucker*, I listened to those fuckin' lyrics, motherfucker!"

"Name one lyric from that song."

"I didn't lis—I've heard it... But what I and millions of fans all over the world wanna know about Bowie, is: first you, then Jagger, then Iggy. What in the hell's he got?"

"Jagger and Iggy?"

"Yeah, you know he fucks everybody in the rock 'n' roll circuit. He's a bigger groupie than Jann Wenner!"

Deadpan. "He's the one who's getting fucked."

"Didja fuck 'im?" All bravado. But like bullfighting a handball court.

"He's fucking himself. He doesn't know it, though." Even. Level. Vibrating soundless hum.

"He's like a straw man," I raved, "a nonentity..."

"If you had a brain you'd take a look at Angela and Tony De Fries, then think twice before you put David down. He's got him by the balls, I've seen it, he's ripping him off, I can't tell ya the situation but I'm telling ya, don't put Bowie down."

I was getting frustrated. What an uncooperative subject. "You mean you still won't say anything anti-Bowie?"

"No."

"Shit." I figured I better change the subject, seeing how there was one. Behind his bed was a cassette deck emanating an endless stream of the kind of funky synthesizer muzak that Herbie Hancock snores up. "Hey, Lou, why doncha turn off all that jazz shit?"

"That's not jazz shit, and you wouldn't know the difference anyway."

"I know all this music shit, BLAH BLAH BLAH!, and I'm telling you that—"

"You don't know, you've never listened."

"—that Bowie:" — and here I began to sing in loud Ezio Pinza baritone, except I got the syllables in the words

mixed up 'cause I was drunk — "LIKE FROM CATSUM JAPAN.' You know that's bullshit, c'mon Lou! You know better than that! He ripped off all his shit that's decent from you, you and Iggy!"

"What does Iggy have to do with it?"

Your dancing for one thing, *shithead*. But I didn't say that then because I didn't think of it. Instead I fulminated: "You were the originals!"

"The original what?"

I went on about Iggy, Bryan Ferry ("Bryan Ferry. Jesus. He was cute for awhile," snorted Lou.) and Bowie, and he surprised me with a totally unexpected blast at the Pop: "David tried to help the cat because he believed there was more to Iggy than I knew right off the top. David's making a mistake somewhat similar now but David's brilliant and Iggy is... stupid. Very sweet but very stupid. If he'd listened to David or me, if he'd asked questions every once in awhile... I'd say, 'Man, just make a one-five change, and I'll put it together for you. You can take all the credit. It's so simple, but the way you're doin' it now you're just making a fool out of yourself. And it's just gonna get worse and worse.' He's not even a good imitation of a bad Jim Morrison, and he was never any good anyway..."

Iggy a fool. This from the man who provoked mass snickers on two continents two years running with *Transformer* ("You hit me with a flower") and *Berlin* ("And these are the boxes that she kept on the shelf/Where she kept her... poetry and stuff"). I decided that me and all the Iggy fans had had enough of this horseshit, so I bulldozed on: "Did you shoot speed tonight before you went on?"

He acted genuinely surprised. "Did I shoot *speed*? No, I didn't. Speed kills. I'm not a speedfreak." This started out as essentially the same rap Lou gave me one time when I went to see the Velvets at the Whisky in 1969, as he sat there in the dressing room drinking honey from a jar and talking a mile a minute, about all the "energy in the streets of New York," and lecturing me about the evils of drugs. All speedfreaks are liars; anybody that keeps their mouth open that much can't tell the truth all the time or they'd run out of things to say. But now he got downright clinical. "You better define your terms. What kind of speed do you do, hydrochloride meth, hydrochloride amphetamine, how many milligrams...?"

The pharmacological lecture was in full swing, and all I could do was giggle derisively. "I used to shoot Obetrols, shit man!"

"Bullshit you used to shoot Obetrols." Lou was warming to his subject now, revving up. Closing in for the kill. Show you up, punk. "You'd be dead,

you'd kill yourself. You were probably stupid and didn't even put 'em through cotton. You could have gotten gangrene that way..."

Then he's pressing me again, playing dirty: "What's an Obetrol?"

I got mad again. "It's in the neighborhood of Desoxyn. You know what an Obetrol is, you lyin' sack of shit! This is the *fourth* time I've interviewed you and you lied every time! The first time—"

"What's Desoxyn?" He had just said this, in the same dead monotone, for the 15th time. Interrupting me every second word in the tirade above, coldly insistent, sure of himself, all the clammy finality of a technician who knows every inch of his lab with both eyes put out.

But I was cool. "It's a methedrine derivative."

The kill: "It's 15 milligrams of pure methamphetamine hydrochloride with some cake paste to keep it together." Like an old green iron file slamming shut. "If you do take speed," he continued, "you're a good example of why speedfreaks have bad names. There's A-heads and there's speedfreaks... Desoxyn's 15 milligrams of methamphetamine hydrochloride held together with cake paste, Obetrol is 15 milligrams of—"

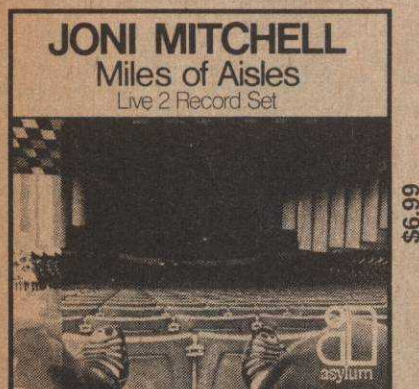
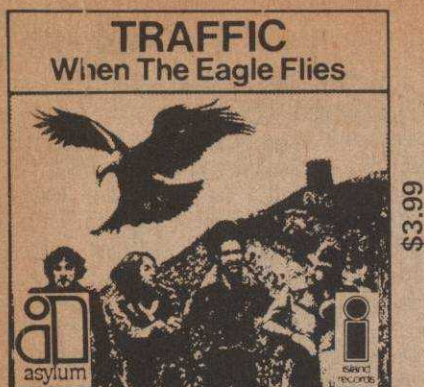
"Hey, Lou, you got anything to drink?"

"No... You don't know what you're doing, you haven't done any research. You make it good for the rest of us by taking the crap off the market. Plus you're poor. [I told you he'd stop at nothing. It's this kind of thing that may well be Lou Reed's last tenuous hold on herodism. And I don't mean heroism.] And even if you weren't poor you wouldn't know what you were buying anyway. You wouldn't know how to weigh it, you don't know your metabolism, you don't know your sleeping quotient, you don't know when to eat and not to eat, you don't know about electricity..."

"The main thing is money, power and ego," I said, quoting an old Ralph J. Gleason column for some reason. I was getting a little dazed.

"No, it has to do with electricity and the cell structure..."

I decided to change my tack again. "Lou, we're gonna have to do it straight. I'll take off my sunglasses [ludicrously macho Silva-Thin wrap-arounds parodying the ones he sported on the first Velvets album, which I had been wearing all evening] if you'll take off yours." He did. I did. Focus in on shriveled body sprawled on the bed facing me with Thing behind him staring at beehives on the moon, Lou's sallow skin almost as whitish-yellow as his hair, whole face and frame so transcendently



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emaciated he had indeed become insect-
 ival. His eyes were rusty, like two
 copper coins lying in desert sands under
 the sun all day with telephone lines
 humming overhead, but he looked
 straight at you. Maybe through you.
 Then again, maybe it was a good day for
 him. Last time I saw him his left eyeball
 kept rolling off to the side, and it was
 no parlor trick. Anyway, I was ready to
 ask my Big Question, the one I'd pondered
 over for months.

"Do you ever resent people for the
 way that you have lived out what they
 might think of as the dark side of their
 lives for them, vicariously, in your
 music or your life?"

He didn't seem to have the slightest
 idea what I was talking about; shook his
 head.

"Like," I pressed on, "I listen to
 your records: shootin' smack, shootin'
 speed, committing suicide—"

"That's three per cent out of a
 hundred songs."

"Like with all this decadence and
 glitter shit — none of it would have
 happened if not for you, and yet I
 wonder if you—"

"I didn't have anything to do with
 it."

"Bullshit, you *started* it, singing
 about smack, drag queens, etc."

"What's decadent about that?"

"Okay, let's define decadence. You
 tell me what you think is decadence."

"You. Because you used to be able
 to write and now you're just fulla shit.
 You don't keep track of music, you're
 not on top of what's happening, you
 don't know the players, or who's doin'
 what. It's all jive, you're getting very
 egocentric."

I let it pass. The true artist does not
 stoop to respond in kind to jibes from
 an old con. Besides, he was half right.
 Besides, I simply could not believe that
 he could so blithely disclaim everything
 that he had disseminated, no, *stood for*
and exploited, for so many years. It was
 like seeing a dinosaur retreating into an
 ice cave. He'd done the same thing
 before. Last interview he merely dis-
 claimed association with the gay move-
 ment, which he really doesn't have
 anything to do with. But now, post-
Sally Can't Dance and apparently ready
 to clean up as much of his act's exo-
 skeleton as it took to hit the bigger time
 (*But you shoot up onstage. But it's only*
a rock 'n' roll show. This ain't
Altamont. Or the Exploding Plastic
Inevitable), he was brushing it all away
 like dandruff off his black street-punk
 T-shirt. "I dismissed decadence when I
 did 'The Murder Mystery.'" Grand
 sweeping statements like this are the
 kind of bullshit to which this pop star is
 particularly prone. Like all the rest of
 them, I guess.

"Bullshit, man, when you did *Trans-*

former you were playing to pseudo-
 decadence, to an audience that wanted
 to buy a reprocessed form of deca-
 dence..."

Barbara interrupted. "Lou... it's
 getting late."

Suddenly the tone of the whole
 scene changed. He was a petulant kid,
 up past bedtime, not exactly whiny, still
 insectival, but also blatantly pampered,
 cajoled, looked after, leashed, nursed,
 checked unless he chose to make a scene
 and possibly blow his cool. "Oh, it's fun
 arguing with Lester."

"But you have to get up in the
 morning," she insisted, "and go to
 Dayton."

"Oh," replied Lou, hardy old buz-
 zard, blow winds blow and all that, "I'll
 live through it." Besides, other things
 were on his mind. He wanted to play me
 some records. The Artist actually want-
 ed to submit something to me, the
 Critic, for my consideration and verdict!
 I felt honored. So what did he wanna
 submit? The Ron Wood solo album.

Jesus. If there's one thing I hate to
 hear out of musicians it's music talk.
 Most boring thing on the face of the
 earth. Especially since the only album I
 could think of that could conceivably
 be more nothing than that Herbie Han-
 cock shit he was playing before was this
 Ron Wood set. Blandest of the bland. I
 yelled at him to shut it off — "I've
 heard that crap!" — but he was off
 again, into another subject that interest-
 ed *him*, the selfish sonofabitch, and not
 listening to me at all.

"This guy George Benson, years ago,
 he was a bass player, invented the
 Benson amplifier, absolutely no distor-
 tion, totally clean, totally pure sound.
 It's interesting what Hancock's doing
 with the Arp."

It was getting worse. He had been
 patient with me, but I was beginning to
 have visions of future Lou Reed albums:
 stalwart Andy Newmark and Willie
 Weeks, who have appeared on every
 album made by every hasbeen popstar
 in the world recently, playing with Lou
 Reed, so the followup to *Sally Can't*
Dance sounds like the Ron Wood album
 like George Harrison's *Dark Horse* like
 all those other faceless LPs involving
 this floating crap game of technically
 impeccable hacks. And on top of that a
 funky Herbie Hancock moog spider
 jiving around, while on top of *that* Lou
 drones his usuals in that slurred and
 basically arrhythmic voice: "You're alllll
 fucked... I can do anything I want...
 putdown, putdown... speed, speed,
 New York, New York..."

"I hate Herbie Hancock," I said.

"I've got something here," he said,
 "that is the stuff I want to do, that I
 meant by heavy metal. I had to wait a
 couple of years so I could get the
 equipment, now I've got it and it's

done. I could have sold it as electronic classical music, except the one I've got that I've finished now is heavy metal, no kidding around."

I was too drunk to be ready to hear it, but it didn't matter because he turned on the tape again and it was — *the Ron Wood album!* I made him shut it off and he continued: "I could take Hendrix. Hendrix was one of the great guitar players, but I was better. But that's only because I wanted to do a certain thing and the thing I wanted to do that blew his mind is the thing I've finally got done that I'll stick on RCA when the rock 'n' roll shit gets taken care of. Now most people can take maybe five minutes of it—"

Sounds promising, but I was more interested in talking attitudes than music, and besides Lou has been such a bullshit liar for so long that I cut in: "I think most people think you're dead. Because you've encouraged them to, with your first three solo albums." He wasn't interested. Remembering the first night I owned *Berlin* (I took it to a friend's birthday party, where every new arrival wanted to hear it, so we got to listen to its entirety about 25 times in one night. The party ended up with a room full of total strangers making vicious verbal slashes at each other. But we had laughed at the record, so) I asked him: "When you recorded *Berlin*, did you think people would laugh at it?"

Lou took his snoot and grabbed a coconut. "I couldn't care less."

"You know, Lou, one thing that I kinda resent about *Berlin* is that you never give her point of view. It was a very selfish album: 'I'm beating you up, bitch.' 'You're dead, bitch.'"

"She was making it with a dealer."

Hoping to pry a little autobiographical dirt (which is what a good portion of *Berlin* amounts to) out of Lou, I asked him about Betty, his ex-wife, and got a typically effusive answer: "She was a secretary when one was needed at the time."

She was a nursemaid, but then many people close to Lou seem to fall into that role. We argued a bit about the autobiographic content of his songs, and Lou asserted, predictably, that his songs were not autobiographical but existed in a zone of their own, and moreover could only be truly understood by a certain distinct elite audience. I told him that in my estimation the majority of his solo work suffered principally by its incredible obviousness, all the subtlety left ages ago and he's just an old ham cradling the asp; I asked him if all his songs had elite meanings to please explain to me the secret meaning of *Sally's* "Animal Language," otherwise known as the Bow Wow Song (dead dog meets cat, they try to fuck, fail, shoot

up fat man's sweat) (really a specimen of mind rot at its finest).

"'Animal Language' isn't obvious. Who do you think the animals are? You think it's a dog and a cat? Who's the dog, who's the cat, who are the animals that are so fucked up they gotta shoot up somebody's sweat to get off?"

I dunno, Lou, you tell me. There are eight million stories in the Naked City... "One thing I like about you," I interjected, "is that you're not afraid to lower yourself. For instance, 'New York Stars.' I told Dennis I thought you were lowering yourself by splattering all these people like the Dolls and dumb little bands with your freelance spleen, but then I realized that you've been lowering yourself for years."

His riposte: "You really are an asshole. You went past assholeism into some kinda urinary tract. The next time you come up with a phrase as good as 'curtains laced with diamonds dear for you,' instead of all this Dee-troit bullshit, let me know."

"Obviously," I said, "what you're selling under your name now is pasteurized decadence. In the old days you were really a badass Lou, but now it's all pasteurized."

He told me that I was jaded and chided me for not being able to get into "a very nice song" like "Billy." Speaking of which, I replied, "Wouldn't you say that in 'Billy' when you say 'His nerves were shot but not me,' that's a slight exaggeration or distortion there?" The you're-dead-bitch syndrome.

"No."

"Well, you're a liar then. You've made a career out of being a degenerate, and I think you should fess up to that. You have not primarily distinguished yourself as a musician, although you have come up with some great riffs, and I don't know why you keep trying to play me all this high-tech music crap, because basically you're a lit. In your worst moments you could be considered like a bad imitation of Tennessee Williams."

"That's like saying in your worst moments you could be considered a bad imitation of you."

"Don't you ever feel like a victim of yourself?"

"No."

Barbara is whispering to me: "Do you really think it's going to get any better?"

"Sure," I said, and turned to Lou. "What do you think that the sense of guilt manifested in most of your songs has to do with being Jewish?"

"I don't know anyone Jewish."

Barbara starts to put the pressure on in earnest: "It's 3:30, Lou."

"Well, that's true, it's 3:30. So... what? What would you like me to do, lock the door, hang my feet from the

surdisms
lingness
on other-
m Elvis
Boone,
sloppy

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s whose
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and listen to half a channel of 20?"

Wi' she said.

wants to talk." Lou mumbled. "You're wrong. Dennis said if I to, I could. I said sure. Direct the higher up. Go ahead and Call him up."

just grunted no. I could not hat this man was actually asking man to call his manager and wake him up at 3:30 in the morning to ask whether or not he could stay up a little bit later to talk to me. And of course it didn't really have anything to do with me. It was a cranky child, but then a large part of Lou's mythic appeal has always been his total infantilism. Barbara, incidentally, was the same employee who had to cart Lou's Scotch-comatose body off to his room at the end of his last visit here. Now he was ready to talk all night, even though neither one of us had been listening to the other at all: "I think it's being made very hard on the cat, personally. I'm telling you, no. I'm interested in some of the things he has to say, even though I think he's an idiot."

"We think the same thing of each other," I offered. I was getting tired.

"He's trashy," continued Lou, "and I think you oughta get a kick out of trash while you can."

"But you *have* been," insisted Barbara, "for almost *two hours*!"

"Well, I feel like getting some more. There's some shit I wanna play him, against his will." He turned back to me. "This guy George Benson, invented the hollowbody electric bass with absolutely no distortion..."

"Uh, lissen, Lou," I said. "Barbara's right. We gotta go too. This could go on forever." I gathered up my stuff and started for the door. As I was going out I could hear his voice behind me, dull basso, stale bitchy bandinage fluttering off into dust: "You Seattle boys are all the same... A-200... cornflakes..."

I never met a hero I didn't like. But then, I never met a hero. But then, maybe I wasn't looking for one.

Triumvirat

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 61.

It was the music of our generation, and I liked it."

"Yes," agreed Jürgen. "But coming to U.S. I find people are naturally funky people, the way they walk. The sound of siren in the street going woeeiiiing, woeeinng — a natural synthesizer. Germans always walk straight. It's something to do with the climate, you know."

"But your music doesn't sound at all like Amon Duul's, or Tangerine Dream's?" I interposed, in mind the sonic hums, warbles and synthesized

mashed potatoes from some of Deutschland's finest.

"That is correct!" Hans was right on the ball. "In the early 70s there wasn't much going on in rock and people wanted a bandwagon they could jump on. So they turned to Germany which was doing stuff with synthesizers and a steady rhythm and very weird things, and it was called German Rock... er, Deutsch Rock..." There was a pause. Someone tittered and Hans shouted, "All right. Go ahead and say it — *Kraut Rock*!"

"The English, they said 'play something weird,' and so the German bands came out with something very weird, spacey. And the people, they said, 'A ha! Stockhausen!' But we never played Kraut Rock because it was fashionable."

"Well then, if you don't care to be associated with Kraut Rock, how do you like being compared to ELP all the time?" A pause. "It's a question of similar line-up," considered Jürgen slowly. "In the end, I guess it's not a *bad* thing: when people say we sound like ELP. ELP (chuckle) is not a *bad* group."

Hans: "I won't knock them because they are one of my favorite groups. But ELP are three kinds of superstars and sometimes they are together and sometimes they are not together. Three solists. Doing his own thing. Because if Emerson does this, then Lake says 'I must do this now to catch up!' I've seen them about five times live." The criticism was coming out now, like quick invisible darts. Hans' diction and the way his "w's" were sounding like "v's" and "V's" vice versa, was making my head spin pleasantly. All this precision was sort of sexy — oversized Krauts or not.

"Ah, what's the groupie scene like in Germany?"

"Zere is *no* groupie scene in Germany!"

"Zere are three, or two, groupies in Germany and they are always booked up with the agency who books the American or English bands." Hans looked strained and a sour look spread across even the no-comprendo Helmut's face a half a football field away. "Ve haf no money for groupies in Germany. Ve are too poor." Hans explained that one top Anglo band had to have call girls brought in for them by the record company because there were no groupies around. "No Starship Ones either." Hans was getting worked up into an Aryan anger.

Jürgen leaned forward, his giant corporate face slowly filling up the entire board room. "You see, since we haf no groupies, we haf time to take care of our business. And zatt is somezink new for the American business man!" A giant hand slammed down on the table. Yuck Yuck. "It's unbelievable how many mil-

lions are lost in bad contracts."

Few groups write songs, nasty lyrics about the music business. Not like Triumvirat's "Mr. Ten Percent." Why?

"It's phony when you sit down and write about love when you're getting ripped off. It's such a fairy tale."

What kind of fairy tale, Mr. Grimm? "Everything's fine when you're making them money," Hans took off his John Lennon shades. "First you get a big meal. Then drinks. And another drink. Then you chat about TV and football. Then they tell you nice things and then more drinks and then they COME TO THE POINT. Then," says Hans Bathelt, "I don't care any more for the meal."

"Ya," the ball passes to Jürgen, "the managers say 'look, you just play your music and we'll take care of the business!' Vell, Triumvirat thinks business is very interesting. We are very interested in vat's happening, and we ALWAYS KNOW VAT'S HAPPENING." The hand boomed on the table.

"This is the result of working in Germany." Jürgen's blond face lowered in the committee room. "Because you know ven Germans do things, they do them very vell. There is a word for it, *verkuntlishkeit*, and it means doing things perfectly. That was very new for American businessmen."

"Ve vere suprizd by the press bio they made up for us." Jürgen fingered the poop sheet laid out like a tabloid. The 48 point red headlines blared forth the word "ACHTUNG!"

"Yes," Jürgen continued sadly, "and they summed it up by saying 'so on and so forth... the music of Herr Fritz.' You see, even then they couldn't let us just be musicians. 'Fritz' is the model German name, everybody in America know. And they didn't just say 'Fritz,' or Mr. Fritz, or Jürgen. But *Herr* Fritz. It's so funny. Ve vere all born after the War and I know the War nostalgia thing is all over the world. And it's even in the record industry. Is that all the Americans identify with? Nazis? Storm Troopers?"

The Blue Oyster Cult was brought up. The Dictators. But those quasi-neurotic metal hybrids meant nothing to the rock and rollers from Cologne. "Next time we play we'll have tanks rolling in the background," Hans smiled, true punk devil in his eyes. "Ve vill have an arch and a sawastika and uniforms. The record company might think this up. If I would tell them, they would do it. The kids would love it. New fascist rock group from Germany! Communist too! People would interview us and ask us if we'd seen Hitler recently."

"Yah, he's working in Germany as a coal miner." Jürgen rubbed his hands.

"Yes and we would bomb the stage at the end of the show."